UNDER PRESSURE
Contemporary Prints from the Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and his Family Foundation
INTRODUCTION

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Under Pressure: Contemporary Prints from the Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and his Family Foundation began with a chance meeting between Joslyn Art Museum Chief Curator Toby Jurovics and Portland-based print collector Jordan D. Schnitzer in the spring of 2011. That afternoon, Jordan invited Toby to his office for an introduction to his collection, recognized as the most comprehensive assembly of contemporary printmaking in the United States. During their conversation, Jordan generously offered Joslyn Art Museum the chance to develop an exhibition to share with audiences in Nebraska. The Museum seized this opportunity to display the finest prints and works on paper created during the past half century by a diverse and talented array of artists. Thanks to Jordan’s generous spirit, this exhibition (which represents only a small portion of his remarkable collection) will also travel to the Wichita Art Museum, Utah Museum of Art, and Missoula Art Museum.

The question, “why printmaking?” was one of the driving forces behind the exhibition. As a vehicle for creative expression, this medium has engaged artists for centuries, but contemporary printmaking has been particularly challenging and compelling. Artists working across a range of genres and disciplines have addressed printmaking not as a supplemental practice to painting or sculpture, but as an equal and independent creative avenue. Charting a variety of artistic concerns from minimalism to pop, conceptual art to social practice, Under Pressure examines the central importance of printmaking in postwar American art production.

The opportunity to dig deeply into the artists and works in Under Pressure is a reflection Jordan Schnitzer’s approach to collecting. Casting a wide net, Jordan has acquired the work of dozens of artists, while pursuing an astute selection of major figures in substantive depth. However, it is not just the act of building a comprehensive collection that motivates Jordan — it is the belief that it should be shared with others. In so doing, we can all experience Jordan’s passion, enthusiasm and love for the arts and the tradition of printmaking. We thank Jordan Schnitzer for making this exhibition possible.
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Under Pressure: Contemporary Prints from the Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and his Family Foundation features work by forty artists spanning the last five decades. Tracing general currents in the art world, as well as major developments specific to printmaking, Under Pressure addresses how the print rose to prominence in postwar American art. Bringing together artists from different time periods who work in an array of media and styles, the exhibition illustrates the print’s infinite versatility and the ways in which it has impacted many artists’ broader practices.

Until the 1940s, very few American artists, particularly painters, deemed printmaking to be a worthy venture. Some viewed prints as an inferior medium, as they were often used for reproducing original work, while many artists were uncomfortable with the uncertainty of a piece would look like until ink was transferred to a surface, a defining characteristic of the printmaking process. Others struggled with the intrinsic distance printing creates between the artist’s hand and an artwork’s surface. This disconnect was especially challenging for the Abstract Expressionists, whose emergence following World War II marked a tidal change as New York became the epicenter of the art world. Abstract Expressionist painters, such as Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, relied on immediate engagement with their media to generate bold yet intimate canvases that were thought to embody the spirit of the “genius artist.” The physical act of making, or the gesture, was essential to these artists, as was producing richly textured, complex surfaces. In 1939, British painter and printmaker Stanley William Hayter moved his studio, Atelier 17, from Paris to New York. His influence quickly rippled through that city as preeminent artists of the time period, including Pollock and Mark Rothko, flocked to Atelier 17 to learn about intaglio. For this small-format printing process, an artist cuts an image into a metal plate using a sharp tool or chemicals. The grooves left on the plate hold ink, which is then transferred to paper when the plate is run through a press. Hayter was instrumental in changing perceptions in the United States about the role of prints in the fine arts. He advocated for the participation of the artist in
American artists to view printmaking as a serious endeavor, and has remained a strong current in the field since the medium’s incipient stages. Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg were among the earliest artists to integrate printmaking into their practices. Having worked in painting and mixed media, both embraced the print because it compelled them to think in fundamentally different ways regarding how an image could be conceived and the process that leads to realizing a final work of art.

In the mid-1950s, Rauschenberg began producing “combines,” large, three-dimensional collages that suggest unexpected connections among disparate found objects. Through printmaking, he could unite the idea of these assemblages with a highly improvisational approach to creating art, while challenging the notion that prints were necessarily replicas or identical editions. Rauschenberg’s *Signs* (1970) and *Tibetan Locks (Avenue)* (1987) testify to the visual and conceptual fluidity in his practice among sculpture, painting, and printmaking. Composed of appropriated images from popular culture, the world of politics, and his travels abroad, these prints speak to Rauschenberg’s life-long artistic desire to shroud personal memories and experiences in society’s collective readings of his subject matter.

Johns, like Rauschenberg, believed the element of chance inherent in printmaking was not prohibitive but rather that it opened the door for experimentation and creative development. According to Johns:

> The process of printmaking allows you to do things that make your mind work in a different way than, say, painting with a brush does…things which are necessary to printmaking become interesting in themselves and can be used in painting where they’re not necessary but become like ideas.

This understanding of printmaking was a distinct departure from the belief that prints were secondary to other artforms. For Johns to so plainly express that prints were not afterthoughts was especially provocative given that most of his print-work culled imagery from his own paintings, sculptures, and drawings. For example, the lithograph *Between the Clock and the Bed* (1969)
belongs to a series of paintings and prints Johns made during the 1980s that explores a single theme through subtle variations in color, graphic elements, and texture. The smooth, seamless effect Johns created in this print is one advantage of lithography—it allows multiple images to be printed on a single surface without the relief that layered paint yields.

Like Johns and Rauschenberg, many later artists have adopted printmaking as a natural extension of their work in other media. In Roger Shimomura’s lithographic series *Mistaken Identities*, clean, pronounced lines and flattened imagery clearly recall his cartoon-inspired paintings. Sarah Morris’ screenprints adhere to her signature dependence on the line as a key compositional element and speak to her ongoing fascination with architectural spaces. At the other end of the spectrum is Judy Pfaff, who is best known for conceiving messy, large-scale installations. Pfaff asserts that prints have always been integral to her practice, partially due to their practicality. While her three-dimensional work requires significant commitments of time, space, and money, Pfaff’s prints are portable and, by comparison, inexpensive to produce and purchase. Despite the fact that prints are a dramatically different conduit for expressing her ideas, they reveal Pfaff’s dedication to process and retain the collage aesthetic that characterizes her installations.

More recent printmaking continues to reflect the spirit of experimentation embodied by artists like Johns and Rauschenberg. Former political activist Enrique Chagoya began working with prints early in his artistic career, having found inspiration in printmaking’s use for propaganda, information dissemination, and grassroots social movements. Chagoya’s artwork draws heavily on art history and popular culture to offer incisive, but often humorous, commentary on developments in global politics and economics. Through printmaking, he is able to accumulate imagery from these various sources and fuse them with his own original drawings. For Chagoya, trial and error is central to creating an original artwork that can exist in multiples. He explains that he finds printmaking to be “freeing,” and often he will work and rework a print, exploring countless techniques and mixing inks, until a piece feels “right.”
Barbara Kruger’s practice is also rooted in the political, calling attention to cultural stereotypes and social inequities through the lens of imagery gathered from mass media. Though Kruger often turns to collage, printmaking allows her to combat stereotypes using precisely the same medium and images employed to perpetuate them. The series We Will No Longer Be Seen And Not Heard (1985), the artist’s first attempt at printmaking, combines images from advertisements with the words of the title phrase. Ironically, the individuals in each print are effectively silenced, forced to perform gestures similar to sign language to communicate their demands, a tension between image and text that is common in Kruger’s work.

Vija Celmins, who is known for her intricate canvases and supreme draughtsmanship, explores the unique possibilities for image-making that arise in the realm of prints. Labor is not just apparent in Celmins’ work, but is in fact essential to how she creates images; she will often spend months, even years, producing a single work. She sees in printmaking the opportunity to test material limits and reimagine how a mark is made. Furthermore, she believes that printmaking allows for greater maneuverability within her fairly narrow visual lexicon. Ocean with Cross #1 (2005) is one of many prints Celmins made that studies the texture of the ocean surface. The artist describes her relationship with this subject as that of a dog with a bone – she obsesses over it, buries it, and uncovers it, all in the hopes that her subconscious will steer both her mind and her hand.1

Starting in the 1960s, artists engaged in performance and action-based art found printmaking provided expanded options for translating ephemeral events into concrete work. John Baldessari’s diverse practice has included printmaking since the 1970s. Throwing Three Balls in the Air to Get a Straight Line (Best of Thirty-Six Attempts) (1973), comprised of 12 color offset lithographs, began as a group of photographs that documented the artist’s executing the title activity. In each image, three red balls float above the tops of palm trees, suspended in a vibrant blue California sky. While at its core Throwing Three Balls… functions as a record of an event, as with all of Baldessari’s work there is more to this series than meets the eye. The artist has
always been committed to creating imagery that is at once stimulating and beguiling. He repeatedly uses dots to blot out parts of images, leaving viewers to question what is being obscured and why. In this work, the dots appear again, but their placement is random and even more mysterious, merely hinting at the action taking place below.

The adaptability of the print, as well as the ease with which an artist can alter a print plate from one work to the next, makes it ideal for producing extended series. Print suites typically feature gradual changes in composition or variations on a pictorial theme and are considered incomplete if any individual piece is missing from the group. With Roy Lichtenstein’s *Bull Profile Series*, for example, removing one print would create a void, confusing the otherwise logical breakdown of the first image in the sequence. One major benefit of the series is that it allows artists to shift the viewing experience of two-dimensional work from abbreviated looking to prolonged engagement. This approach to printmaking was especially provocative for artists such as sculptor Donald Judd, who believed that viewers should have sustained physical dialogues with his artwork. Judd’s unti-tled print suite from 1988 is comprised of ten woodcuts divided into groups of two, with each print functioning as the inverse of its pair. Through the continual dissection of a basic geometric form, Judd examines the relationship between negative and positive space, a duality central to the artist’s sculptural work, and proposes a progression that could, in theory, continue indefinitely. By contrast, Sol LeWitt’s series are intended to be closed systems that explore every possible variation within a set of rules based on simple formal elements such as line, shape, and color. For LeWitt, one of the first Conceptual artists, physically executing an artwork was secondary to its conception. “Serial components,” LeWitt claimed, “are multipartite pieces with regulated changes. The differences between the parts are the subject of the composition.” Color Bands (from *Wadsworth Portfolio*) (2000) exemplifies this model – its structure is methodical yet enigmatic, preventing any possibility for continuation.

The basic definition of printmaking – the act of setting ink onto a surface through indirect means – remains the same today as it was...
60 years ago, yet the understanding of what a print is or can be has been greatly expanded. Ellen Gallagher’s mixed-media portfolio deLuxe (2004-5) features 60 works executed using a combination of print processes and non-print techniques, including laser cutting, collage, and handpainting. Like Kruger, Gallagher finds motivation in existing printed matter. By modifying, but never totally obliterating, her source material, the artist cleverly intervenes into the glossy world of print media in order to cast a critical eye on prevalent racial and gender biases. deLuxe, Gallagher’s most extensive project to date, presented the artist with an opportunity to develop new methods to carry out her interventions.

The selection of work on view in Under Pressure represents a small portion of Jordan Schnitzer’s rich and diverse collection of prints from the 1960s through the present. Schnitzer has collected many of the artists featured in the exhibition in-depth, including John Baldessari, Ed Ruscha, and Kiki Smith, reflecting his commitment to tracing their ongoing impact in the realm of contemporary prints. Since its inception, the Schnitzer Collection has charted the most compelling developments in printmaking and will continue to evolve alongside the artists to whom he has shown such dedication. Master printer Craig Zammiello, who worked with Gallagher on deLuxe, explains that contemporary printmaking is an ongoing process of discovery driven by the visions of artists. If the history of postwar American printmaking is any indication, artists’ determination to break through barriers, along with the rapid pace of technological advancement, will continue to propel this medium into uncharted territory.

While I was growing up in Portland, Oregon, where I still reside, my mother operated a local art gallery that focused on contemporary Northwest artists. It is through her and her gallery that I gained a love of the arts.

When I was fourteen years old I bought my first painting, and since then, while I appreciate all visual and performing arts, my principal passion is for contemporary art and prints. That initial acquisition started a lifelong pursuit, not only to be surrounded by art, but to build a collection that could be shared with the public. After several museums borrowed works for initial exhibitions, I realized that if I were able to acquire a significant number of prints and multiples, I might be able to share these with many audiences. During the last twenty years, I have had over thirty-five exhibitions that have traveled to more than seventy-five museums.

In addition to helping organize these exhibitions of work from my collection which are loaned without fees, I also help fund educational programs that are tailored to individual community needs. Often these programs include underwriting for guest artist lectures, hands-on workshops for children and families, transportation for grade school and high school students, and curriculum materials for teachers.

I have been very pleased in recent years how curators from many institutions have assembled works from the collections into exciting themes in single or touring exhibition. *Under Pressure* provides a wonderful opportunity for people to experience work by the best artists of our time. Jack Becker, Toby Jurovics, and Karin Campbell at Joslyn Art Museum have done a masterful job of selecting an anthology of work that I hope will delight and inform viewers as the exhibition travels throughout the country.

**EXHIBITION SCHEDULE**

**Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska**  
October 6, 2012 – January 6, 2013

**Wichita Art Museum, Wichita, Kansas**  
February 10 – May 12, 2013

**Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City, Utah**  

**Missoula Art Museum, Missoula, Montana**  
February 15 – May 31, 2014

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**COLLECTOR’S STATEMENT**

**JORDAN D. SCHNITZER**

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**HUNG LIU**  
(Chinese b. 1948)

*The Last Dynasty: Countess*, 2009, edition 8/30, lithograph, 50 x 21 inches, Publisher: Shark’s Ink, Lyons, CO.